

Ambassador's Remarks – Reception in Honor of Judy & Dennis Shepard

Good evening, everyone. It's great to see so many people at the residence tonight to welcome Judy and Dennis Shepard to Warsaw. Judy and Dennis, I'm sure the last twenty-four hours has been a constant barrage of new faces and names, but I want to assure you that this is a great group we have here tonight.

I would like to say a special hello to high-level guests present here. And of course, I especially want to express my gratitude to the Campaign Against Homophobia for all your hard work in putting together such a fantastic program for the Shepards.

In 2010, we hosted a barbeque here on behalf of the Warsaw Pride Parade. I know many of the people who joined us on that day are with us again tonight. Since then, the Embassy has remained engaged on LGBT rights, working side by side with Polish NGOs and activists.

As many of you know, Secretary Hillary Clinton has been a forceful advocate of LGBT around the world. Last December, she reiterated on International Human Rights Day, what we all know to be true, that: “Gay rights are human rights, and human rights are gay rights.”

Under her leadership and the leadership of President Obama, U.S. Embassies around the world have stepped up their advocacy on behalf of the fundamental human rights of LGBT persons. And it's not just the United States. Earlier this spring, I was proud to join a group of ten heads of diplomatic missions in Warsaw in signing an open letter of support for this year's Equality Parade. Many of the people who worked on that letter are here tonight.

I'll be the first to admit that when it comes to LGBT rights, the United States still has a long way to go. While American society has made great strides in its acceptance of LGBT persons, there is still work to be done. There's no magic formula to making those rights a reality, to breaking down stigma that so many men and women face today. It was just a year ago that the United States overturned the DADT law for men and women serving in the military. And we're not here to tell anyone what to do. We're here to share our experience, and figure out ways that we can work with our Polish friends and allies to better protect LGBT rights as human rights in our societies.

As a parent of two small children I can begin to understand what the Shepards must have felt after the murder of their son, who grew up as a young citizen of the world seeking to promote international understanding. And all I can say is that Judy and Dennis are an example to all of us. No one would have faulted them if they responded to this heinous crime in private. No one would be in a position to judge parents who suffered such a loss if their responses were only anger or even bitterness.

But here are the Shepards, almost 15 years later, thousands of miles from home, letting people in a faraway place know they are not alone. And sending a message that we want our children, straight or gay, sporty or nerdy, religious or not, whatever their ethnic background, rich or poor, to grow up in societies that do not judge them for how they entered this world. And we want societies that support the families of children who are or seem to be different than others.

We invited Judy and Dennis Shepard to Poland to not only to tell their personal story, or the story of LGBT rights in the United States. We asked that they help share the U.S. experience, to let our friends here know they're not alone.

Tonight we are gathered not only as activists or diplomats or prosecutors or journalists. We're here as family and friends. You are not alone.

Judy and Dennis, no one in America has done more than you to get out the message that "you are not alone." No one has done more to comfort family and friends within the LGBT community. Out of great sorrow you found the courage to help make our country better. From my family to yours, thank you for your tireless work. And thank you for joining us here in Poland.

[YOU INVITE THE SHEPARDS TO THE MICROPHONE]